The Look of the Object: Minimalism in Art and Architecture, Then and Now

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In Modernism the category of the art-object was one of the points at which architecture and the visual arts are differentiated and articulated. The rise of so called 'minimalist' architecture with its fixation on object qualities, and its borrowings from art theory suggests that this difference is collapsing. By looking at works from the late nineteen sixties by Manfredo Tafuri, Michael Fried and Theodor Adorno, this essay opens some of the complexities the theory of the object in the end game of high modernism, and speculates on significance of the new taste for the look of the object.

What is the object which results from architectural work? For most of the twentieth century it would have been typical to think that this was a building, and, also, a kind of concretisation of the process of architectural design. This latter would be true even if the project remained unbuilt, or unbuildable. But both of these definitions have problems. Architects do not consider all buildings as architecture, even if we think that they ought to be. And for the process of architectural design to be interchangeable with its product is a peculiar kind of narcissism. The work of art is to produce artworks which then have a life of their own. What would it be to have objects in the world which are 'architectural' in their own right? These would be objects which would look like a piece of architecture, independently of the process that brought them about, or the old categorical conundrum of whether all buildings are, or should be architecture.

It is precisely this possibility which I believe is raised in current architectural fashion for buildings which have the look of being objects. After decades in which architectural works were considered discursive objects, bundles of relations and references, there is now an overwhelming momentum to see buildings again as physical objects, in the sense of their architecture being a matter of formal properties of three dimensional shape and material arranged in space. We might speculate as to the causes in the change in taste, but in this essay I will consider the significance of such a change and try to put it into some historical context. The significant context here is the idea of modern art. The peculiarities of the concept of the architectural object have been one of the hinges between architecture and the visual arts in modernism, one of the ways that architecture is considered an art, a part of the spectrum of modernist culture, but also different to painting and sculpture. In the fashion for object-like buildings, generally neo-modernist in style, I believe we are witnessing a collapse of this distinction and a new

possibility for considering the architectural object. The space of this possibility becomes apparent in considering the use of the term 'minimalism' to describe this architecture, when, in the visual arts from which it was borrowed, the meaning of minimalism is quite different. Minimalism in the visual arts was an exploration of the category of the art object, and understanding this can show us that there is more than a change in taste in architects having an interest in the look of the object.

We can locate the concept of the object in relation to a three level set of oppositions. At the first level, the artwork as a material object, whether it be a painting, building or musical composition, can be opposed (or not) to the objects of the everyday world. The explanations for this opposition range from the idealist ontology, to simple nominalism, to historical dialectic. Equally, this opposition of art object to quotidian object is often cited by those who refuse it, usually in an attack on ontological or nominalist definitions of art.

At the second level, within the realm of art, the objects of the visual arts can be contrasted with those of architecture, or not. A general distinction between architectural buildings and paintings typically relies on the first level of opposition—that paintings are artworks and buildings quotidian objects. This is despite architecture being 'art' at the general level of culture.

This definition of architecture as an art that produces objects of the everyday is peculiarly modern. In the past, the distinction between architecture and building was very like that between painting and the decorative arts. This introduces the third level of opposition—an historical dialectic of then and now. The differences between art object and quotidian object, and between the visual arts and architecture on this matter, are themselves differently arranged at the origins of modernism, at the end game of modernist formalism in the 1960s and the present.

Arguably, since the sixties the visual arts have acted to undo, or rotate the poles, of the opposition of the artwork and the quotidian object. Contemporary genres such as the 'art of the everyday'[1] have a comportment toward the object quite like the architecture of the high modern period. And indeed, architecture and architectural representation seems to be becoming a trope of art practice as is attested by the work of Ricky Swallow, Rodney Spooner, or Callum Morton in Australia and numerous overseas luminaries.[2] Is this a dialectic that requires that architecture, now, will produce buildings as art objects as they were before modernism? Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao points in this direction. Or, will it be that the visual arts and architecture will move in tandem if not in partnership (as is suggested by Herzog and De Meuron's work with artists such as Thomas Ruff), and in doing so collapse an opposition which has structured much of the institution of art in the last century?[3] In either case it seems the question of the architectural object is returning to the centre of attention.

From the architect's viewpoint, these questions can be focused around 'Minimalism'—Minimalism 'then' in the visual arts of the fifties and sixties, and now in the Minimalist 'style' of present-day architecture.[4] The Minimalism of post-war American art was a kind of anti-expressionist abstraction. It was related to earlier avant-garde practices, for example, Malevich's monochrome paintings and El Lizzitsky's installations.[5] Minimalist practices ignored the traditional aim of abstraction in the exploration

of the formal properties of a medium or discipline and instead used provocatively mute or ambiguous objects to dis-quieten expectations of what the art object might be and to make an observer self-aware of the act of perceiving. By contrast, what is generally called 'minimalism' in architecture is precisely that elegant abstraction to the essentials such as space and material that Minimalism was attacking in art. Is there a relation here, or is this a malapropism? On the issue of the relation of 'minimalisms' in art and architecture there are two common and simplistic lines of thought, and one argument that is theoretically informed. The first opinion is dismissive of minimalist architecture and those who admire it. In such an opinion minimalism in architecture is simple nostalgia for the buildings of the sixties.[6] Pop music and fashion are relevant in filling out the immersive totality characterising nostalgia and Minimalist art is relevant in the same way, but to a lesser extent.

Those who have a likening for minimalist buildings might follow a second, more portentous, theory. This claims that there are objective qualities observable in minimalist architecture which have a heritage in classical art and especially in the aesthetic trope of reduction and abstraction. Minimalist art would, in such a theory, be a phase of experimentation and rediscovery prior to the rolling out of these truths of form in broader culture.[7]

Now let me sketch out a third approach to this question, which I call phenomenological.[8] By this account, any minimalist architecture defined in formal terms (whether this is nostalgia or Platonism) is to be decried. However, the Minimalism of the visual arts of the late sixties has much to teach present day architects at the level of the theory of the subject. The lesson that architects should learn is that the blandness and muteness of the work can cause the inhabitant to become self-conscious of the act of perceiving–conscious of perception's constraint in the frontal dorsal directionality of the body, the horizontality of the visual field, and so on. Thus there might be a minimalist architecture conceptualised as minimalist art was, but the objects it produced would be quite different. Despite its relative sophistication, I am going to argue that this phenomenological position is wrong about architecture and the first two simplistic accounts are roughly correct when shorn of some false assumptions.

At the most basic level this is because phenomenology cannot provide an explanation of disciplinary and material aspects of artmaking, even if it is useful in understanding the relation of the spectator and the artwork. A simple phenomenology could make no difference between the appropriation of art and nature, or between aesthetic appropriation and experience as such. A more historically nuanced phenomenology allows such differences by supposing a history of visualities or visual cultures, which underlies the concrete histories of the art disciplines. Examples of such an approach range from Erwin Panofsky's idea of perspective as the symbolic form of the Renaissance[9] to Michael Baxandall's more materialist concept of a 'period eye' in his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Florence*.[10] Contrary to such accounts of an underlying history of visual organization, Hubert Damisch has established that perspective, with all its interdisciplinary and philosophical ramifications, arises out of the interplay of painting and architecture, not some 'perspectivalist' relation between subject and world which is subsequently worked up differently by painters and architects.[11] I concur with Damisch that there is no history of visualities anterior to the history of the arts.

A second reason for rejecting a phenomenological account of minimalism in architecture is it is often accompanied by historical ignorance. Proponents of a phenomenological minimalism think that it aims to foreground the subjective experience of architecture to an unprecedented degree. But this is to forget that concretised spatial experience, a kind of architecture as cinema or choreography, is the dominant form of architectural aesthetic in the twentieth century epitomised by Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale*.[12] A phenomenology of lived experience has had much greater development and authority in architecture than it has ever had in the visual arts. Contrary to this, I hold that the Minimalism of the visual arts of the 1960s does have the potential to put a shock through architecture. This is not because of what it can tell us of a work on the subject, but rather because Minimalism was also a theory of the art object.

Let me exhibit some of my present prejudices in order to examine them and expedite the argument. I *like* Minimalism as a tendency in buildings because I like the object character of the buildings as architecture. It is possible to feel this way without essentialising form. Buildings which are identifiably architectural objects seem to me to be somehow fresh and timely even if they look like a particular sampling of modernist forms. By contrast, new architecture that lacks this object-hood looks to me like a theatrical staging of experience, or an illustration of a concept. It looks dated. My admiration for narrative picturesque experiential modernism and for utopian propositional buildings is undiminished, but I don't think that it is appropriate to build like that now. This object-hood for which I have a taste is not simply a matter of shearing a cloak of discourse and semantic references from building, nor is it to demand some higher state of formal coherence of the three-dimensional form and materials of buildings. It is rather a question of the ontology of the architectural work. I want an architecture which exists in the objects it produces independent of the process of that production. I want buildings which are *there* like trees or vacuum cleaners, and I think that if these objects can be material enough they will look back at me and this architecture will be art.

My excuse for bothering you with an unseemly discussion of my taste in buildings is that my preference for object-like buildings is also a judgement that the crucial theoretical question in architecture concerns the object, the aesthetic category of the object. At the level of the aesthetic I experience my choice as one made free of determination, but, in fact, the buildings I admire are also those that I know to be thoroughly determined by this historical problematic of the architectural object. Thus I cannot have this taste myself, nor understand it in others, without an entailed argument about what happened to the object in modernism.

My understanding of these matters draws on three sets of theoretical remarks from the late sixties. My attempt to problematise the relation of the art object and experience comes from Michael Fried's 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."[13] My attempt to differentiate architecture and the visual arts within a general concept of art and the artwork draws on Theodor Adorno's concepts of the object and aesthetic material in his *Aesthetic Theory* of 1970.[14] And my historical framework comes from Manfredo Tafuri, whose Frankfurt School-derived concept of 'a crisis of the object,' common to visual art and architecture in modernism, was published in his book *Theories and History of Architecture* of 1968.[15]

Tafuri's 'crisis of the object' is a generalisation of Walter Benjamin's idea that art loses its aura in reduplicative technology and in capitalism generally. Modernism in architecture commenced with a critique of the architectural object in the late nineteenth century. An interest in vernacular building, an analysis of craft production and the advent of industrialised building production quickly became a claim that all building was the responsibility of the architecture profession. The traditional difference of kind between architectural products and ordinary buildings transformed into a relation of architectural concepts and built objects. In 1903, Hermann Muthesis proposed to change the name of the profession to *baukunst* or building art, to make this relation clear.[16] For constructivists, industrialised building implied that architecture was a capacity for conceptualising and organising. What the 'new objectivity' meant in architecture was that buildings were serial objects–instances of this architectural capacity, as much in their production volumes, or their social effects as in their object form. But this vision of architecture as logistics supposed a level of economic and political organisation that did not actually exist at the time. By the late twenties, Tafuri sees this tendency reaching crisis with constructivists in a dialectic with expressionists who, fearful of the progress of capitalist rationality toward totalitarianism, attempted to play up the contradictions of European culture. They did this is by maintaining the unique built object, but, as Tafuri puts it 'exasperating' it, and hollowing out its semantic core. The consequence was that the building, while unique and indeed 'artistic,' became a critical object and not a material one. This dialectic between utopia and criticism continues though the century, according to Tafuri, but became weaker and weaker after 1930, when the dream of 'the plan' ends with the capitalist's great depression and the failure of the Soviet First Five Year Plan. After this, only criticism is plausible as architecture and Tafuri thought that this too had reached its end by 1968. It is in this context that I say that it is stimulating to think again of producing an architectural object—after a century when the erasure or impossibility of the object has been at the centre of the discipline.

Why is the architectural object possible again? I have no convincing explanation but I think that this changed circumstance is observable in the increasing popularity of modernism at the moment. Minimalism in architecture is part of a broad movement called variously 'new modernism' or 'second modernism,' which is now endemic in Europe. This claims to be modernism-as-such cleaned of false politics and sociology and concerned with a vocabulary of form. This explanation is not inconsistent with my own observations on the return of the object. What is startling about this neo-modern minimalism is that it is popular.

The space between *Wallpaper* magazine, the architectural periodicals and the real estate pages of the metropolitan dailies is less than it has ever been.[17] Within the covers of *Wallpaper* magazine buildings have the same ontological status as clothing, hairstyles and motor cars. The forms of high modernism have become popular as product, stripped of discourse, politics and cultural memory. The socialist ideals of New Objectivity, of a life lived free of cultural detritus and over-determined personality, are now displayed as the lifestyle of wealthy apartment dwellers. If trends in Europe are indicative, modernism will be triumphant, universal and ubiquitous in the early twenty first century; having won as a style the contest it previously lost as an ethic. Neo-modernist buildings are aesthetically mute and experienced as objects in the world, just as the first modernism supposed, but the meaning of this is

quite different. Neo-modern buildings are not tokens of an architecture which exists elsewhere in productive capacities, but are commodities which have their cultural meaning in their relations with other commodities such as clothing and consumer electronics.

However, the popular object character I am describing is not the simple consequence of the commodification of culture in late capitalism. If it were, a taste for object-like buildings would be a mere fashion, a display of consumer discretion for social self-aggrandizement. Instead, I claim that the object enjoys its conceptual freshness because of the internal history of architecture in the paradox of a *popular* modernism.[18] For much of the twentieth century modernism was registered against popular taste in building, admonishing the popular for being custom bound and irrational. Architecture needed to be unpopular so as to connote a possible future popularity in a reformed world. The need to differentiate buildings and architecture as objects did not arise because between them there was a temporal difference implicit in avant-garde unpopularity. Buildings were in the present and easily distinguished from architectural works, not by the latter possessing the transcendent qualities of art, but because the architectural building supposed a future when the society would wake up to itself and all buildings would be architecture.

The question of the object is also central to the understanding of the visual arts. Arguably, large parts of twentieth century visual art concerned the relation of the work of art and the artwork. Much progressive art has raised this issue by putting into crisis the supposed differences between art works and quotidian objects.[19] The differences between art and architecture on the status of the object are one way of understanding the relations between the disciplines. I posit the following formula of the relation of the arts during modernism: architecture is an art form, but it differs from the visual arts in that its products are not artworks, buildings being objects in the world like others. (Albeit with different socio-cultural significance or potential as I discussed above). There is a typical and endemic misunderstanding here, particularly among visual artists and critics, who think that architecture could aspire to produce art objects if only it were not compromised by utility. This is a misunderstanding of the complexities and paradoxes in the traditional division between the liberal and mechanical arts.

From the eighteenth century on we see the rise of the notion of autonomous art, such as music composed for listening and not dancing, painting other than for decoration, poetry other than the honorific, and so on, and we do not see (with rare exceptions) the rise of an idea of architecture without a purpose in inhabitation or use. However, for most of this period, until the twentieth century, this autonomy is not, in the first place, a forgoing of functionality, but rather a freedom in the person of the artist. Sir Joshua Reynold's portraits are art, and an enamelled locket is a keepsake. Although both are based on likeness, Reynold's approaches his sitter with a freedom to see and interpret truth while the miniaturist is enslaved by verisimilitude. The difference between architectural works and ordinary buildings was in the same way a matter of the liberality of the architect.

In the twentieth century this liberal mechanical split became problematic and the visual arts became increasingly strident in drawing a line between the paintings made by artists and visual works having

a purpose in decoration, illustration or sentimental affection. Painting sought its proper role in the formal analysis of the medium, in colour, shape and difference between perspectival and tonal depth. In contrast to this modern formalism is the problematic established by Marcel Duchamp with his 'ready-mades.' When Duchamp exhibited a urinal, and a bottle rack, as art, this was more than a play on the nominalist definition of art ("art is what I say it is"). The more serious historical effects of Duchamp's ready-mades have been the claim that art could be practised at a general conceptual level indifferent to the material object in which it is instanced. Now most of twentieth century visual art can be understood as a dialectic between these two positions, a formalism based on disciplines, their materials and history, and a pseudo-nominalism which attempts to close the gap between art-making and aesthetic judgement. Minimalism in the visual arts is firmly on the Duchampian side.

My caricature of the visual arts has the point of showing the distinctness of the theory of the object in architectural modernism. In the early twentieth century (a decade or so before Duchamp's first ready-made) architecture, to maintain its status as high art, took a strategy of drawing a line between the discipline and objects produced, thus securing its freedom from the artwork but maintaining the concept of the discipline of architecture and its distinctness within the arts. I am insisting on this difference or rivalry in the arrangement of the disciplines, because, firstly, this is fundamental to their concepts, and, secondly, because it is this mutual recognition or misrecognition that is unravelling, for better or worse, in the rising interest in the material architectural work, in the object.

But let us return to the sixties, to Fried's critique of Minimalism in art, which in many ways provided the critical matrix for subsequent events.[20] In his critique Fried claimed Minimalism was duplicitous by confronting the spectator with objects which, while being denominated as art, had the *look of not being art*. This undid the spatio-temporal nexus of painting and sculpture. Fried thinks that the concrete period of time in which art objects are perceived should not be part of the concept of the experience of the artwork. We transpose the temporal relations with spatial ones, understanding part to part and part to whole relations within the art object as spatial and independent of the order of visual inspection. Fried thinks that minimal art refuses this transposition, that in inspecting it one is aware of the duration of perception and indeed of its sequence. One looks at Carl Andre's bricks on the floor and wonders if they are art in anyway beyond being named as art. Time passes and nothing else arises from the work. One then becomes self-aware that the process of inspecting the work is the work. Thus minimalism requires the time of one's experience of it. Fried calls this theatricality, playing to an audience.

Those who have read Fried will remember that he prefers the term 'literalism' for the more common Minimalism. What other terms would fit this text? perhaps 'architecture.' Twentieth century architecture explicitly theorised itself around what Fried thinks are the faults of minimalist art: a play on sequenced or durational experience, an insistence on situated-ness in the everyday world, and a claim to be art contained in the look of not being art. Except that this last is inverted from the formula of minimal art. Instead of something which does not look like art turning out to be art, the architectural work looks like art, looks like a unique auratic object, but claims to be an everyday object of the future, which has arrived somewhat early. For example, think how weak Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye would be if it were

understood only as a spatial sequence and compared to baroque churches. It is the building's claim to generic-ness, its claim that, while being an exceptional art work for the moment, it will be an everyday house of the future; it is this claim which intersects with the building's choreography and makes it something more than a technique for affecting the subject.

At the centre of Fried's argument is Tony Smith's description of a drive at night on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. Smith discovers in his experience the conventionality of pictorial form and indeed of art. Fried finds Smith's 'discovery' disingenuous and theatrical. From Fried's point of view Smith is foolish not to already understand, from art, the conventionality of art, and wrong to conclude from this discovery that the art object is no longer required.[21] But perhaps it is significant here that Smith had trained as an architect. Fried nods at this in quoting Smith's praise of the universal availability of the experience of Le Corbusier's buildings at Chandigarh, which Smith thinks "are like a fantastic overhanging cliff." Fried dismisses this as naïve naturalism, but too quickly I think. What an architect means by the facticity of the existence of the building, its co-existence with and interpenetration of the natural and everyday world, is not that architecture is not art, but that this relation to the object is architecture's mode of being art. To aim to make buildings which exist in the world as rocks and cliffs do is not necessarily to claim that architecture is a natural force channelled by the architect. Rather, I claim, it is to insist on what distinguishes architecture as an art under modernism: that architecture is the art the products of which are not artworks. In all this my point is a simple one: including architecture along with the visual arts under the name art complicates considerably what the valorization or the elision of the art object might mean.

Fried's position does not oblige him to take up this architectural problem. He wrote in 1969, and continues to write of painting and sculpture as disciplines with their own histories, canons, and internal problematics.[22] However, the architectural issues I have raised pre-suppose a notion which Fried, and his one-time mentor Celment Greenberg, would reject, a concept of generic art, or an art-as-such preceding any particular art discipline.[23] Greenberg and Fried's opposition to Minimalism is in the end an opposition to a concept of an art practice without medium, a generic art, or as Greenberg puts it, "art at large." What generic art threatens is the generic-ness of aesthetic judgement. If aesthetic judgement is a point at which one relates the specific work to general criteria developed from the great art of the past and the form of judgement itself, then this becomes impossible if art is the same as aesthetic judgement. Two statements that "x is beautiful" can have no dialogue. Not only the art object is erased but so too is the discipline. The universality implicit in my appraising, one at a time, a painting, a musical performance, some flowers and a building, is founded on a difference between disciplines and the differences within them over their history.

Modernist architecture escapes this dichotomy. It aims to be generic art in the sense that its products are not art objects and exist in the world without the categorical assertion of their being art. By developing some concepts of Walter Benjamin's we could say that our aesthetic appropriation of architecture is in the first place 'tactile.'[24] By this Benjamin meant that buildings are appropriated in use, in the context of everyday life. This is not to say that they are pre-cultural, but that they are in the first

place understood socially and not culturally. In such a social tactile world a categorical difference between art, nature and quotidian artefacts is simply not at stake. After this tactile recognition, and indeed on the basis of it, Benjamin thought one could 'contemplate' architecture, appropriate it 'optically' and judge a particular work against the great architectural works of the history of a discipline. For Benjamin, architecture provides a model for a non-transcendental art of everyday objects. This art escapes the censure of Greenberg and Fried by maintaining its disciplinary integrity at a second order. Architecture claimed to be generic art without judging artworks as if they were nature and thus loosing culture. However, remember my historiographic framework; this model I have described is of modernist architecture which relied on the temporal delay of present unpopularity so that the question of its relation to the mundane world was deferred. It is this architecture that I believe is now being washed away by its own popular revival, a second modernism, a fascination with the architectural object to which some architectural theorists and real estate agents give the poignant name of Minimalism.

Material objects constitute a fundamental constraint and requirement in the making of art. But the difference between the art object and the quotidian object is conventional and variable historically and across art disciplines. I have tried to demonstrate this in a certain reversal of terms between now and the late sixties. But the conventionality of these distinctions is not internal to an art discipline nor to art. Indeed the object is where the world enters into art not only in the sense of the individual artwork but at the level of the disciplines and the concept of art. This is why I am trying to take seriously what many commentators mock, the popularity of minimalist architecture. The causes of this lie outside our consideration, but the effect of the rise of a taste for minimalism is enormous for architecture, for the relation of architecture and the visual arts and for our view of how modernism ended.

Theodor Adorno thought that artists' relations to their material mirrored the dialectic of the forces and relations of production.[25] At the most general level this might lead us to suppose that it is something like the increasing remit of commodification which is the ultimate cause of the reification of modernism in the rebuilding of the inner city. But the mechanism of this relation between dialectics is more relevant here. Adorno thought that the material given to the artist to work, that stuff which becomes the content of the work, is actually the petrified forms of earlier practice. Thus the fact that neo-modernist architecture looks like canonical modernism and sometimes like minimalist art is neither coincidence, lack of imagination, nor the return of eternal verities of form. The mute stuff on which neo-modernism works is the dead vocabulary of modernist form, a language which no longer signifies. Art forms this stuff, which is not empirical reality, into empirically existing objects, and when Adorno comes to consider how these relate to the objects of the world he ends up in a very similar position to Fried.[26]

> Object in art and object in empirical reality are entirely distinct. In art the object is the work produced by art, as much containing elements of empirical reality as displacing, dissolving and reconstructing them according to the work's own law. Only through such transformation [...] does art give empirical reality its due, the epiphany of its shrouded essence and the merited shudder in the face of it as in the face of a monstrosity. The primacy of the object is affirmed aesthetically only in the character of art as the unconscious writing of history, as anamnesis of the

> vanquished, the repressed, and perhaps of what is possible. The primacy of the object, as the potential freedom from the domination of what is, manifests itself in art as its freedom from objects.[27]

Like Fried, Adorno thinks that a categorical distinction between artwork and quotidian object is required and required to be self-demonstrable. The art object is a matter of art's internal law, what he calls elsewhere its non-conceptual logic,[28] and this is like Greenberg and Fried's concept of disciplinarity. What Adorno thinks we see in the artwork is not that disciplinarity; he claims that we see the primacy of the object, the empirical art object, its real presence produced out of the immateriality of the artwork. What we see then is what we cannot see from day to day, the actual material conditions of the world prior to their organisation by us. To be art the architectural work must pass from being an organization of space and material by us, to become an empirical object other to us. This exceptional empirical object, the work of art or architecture, shows the possibility of a transformed reality, and at the same time it shows the failure, thus far, of that transformation, the failed totality of social historical existence, and our alienation from nature. Art shows us what we fear, that empirical reality is non-identical with us, and art that deserves the name acts momentarily to abolish that fear which has been institutionalised as culture.[29]

Recently Fried has returned to his essay and strengthened some of his arguments about the objectification of the body of the observer by the refusal of the minimalist art object to reciprocate.[30] He says that this is uncanny and monstrous, just as Adorno claims that the irreducible materiality of the artwork is apprehended as monstrosity. What is monstrous for Fried is art that gives the spectator nothing but their own mundane and ubiquitous 'presence' when it had promised 'present-ness,' a transcendent apprehension of the fact of existence outside of the duration of existing. For Adorno the equation reads otherwise—mundane presence is usually taken as trivial but art exists to show its monstrosity. The contract art has, and fulfils or not, is with the object and not the subject.

There is good reason to consider minimalism in architecture as merely an historicist style, better named 'neo-modernism,' in which the forms of twentieth century architecture are quoted and referred to in a puerile assertion of the self-importance of the discipline. However, I have argued that there is something more going on here, a certain monstrosity, about the object-like character of such buildings. Their very artificiality, their sense of being real things made out of dead ideas, brings to light a question that is obvious enough but which has nevertheless been put aside for most of the twentieth century: "What is the object that is the result of architecture"?

The argument of this essay is, in the end, quite modest. I have shown the use of considering the aesthetic category of the object in thinking of the history of the disciplines of art and architecture. However, the manner in which I have approached this issue is, by contrast, perhaps wildly ambitious, even risking hubris. By exhibiting my own taste for an 'architecture of the object' in the context of some theoretical remarks of Tafuri, Fried and Adorno I aim to make these intricate theories of modernist form into a kind of crude material available to architects in the present in producing new architectural objects.

Footnotes

1 See, for example, *11th Biennale of Sydney: Everyday*, Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1998.

2 See, for example, *Melbourne International Biennial: Signs of Life*, Melbourne: City of Melbourne, 1999; *Die Shrift des Raumes: Kunst Architekture Kunst,* Kunsthalle Wein, 1996. Also John Macarthur, "Building Material," in Michael Snelling (ed), *Installations Rodney Spooner*, Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art.

3 See, for example, Eberswalde Technical School 1997-99 where Herzog and de Meuron had Thomaas Ruff design an image cycle which is the major element of the building façade.

4 The term 'minimalism' was first used by Richard Wollheim "Minimal Art," *Arts* (January 1965). The most significant contemporary discussion is Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Art Forum* 5,10 (1967). A good overview of the art history of minimalism is Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Return of the Real,* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996. In architecture, the term emerges in the late eighties. See Ulrich Conrads, "Editorial," *Daidalos*, 30 (1998); Maggie Toy, "Architectural Design Profile No.110: Aspects of Minimal Architecture," *Architectural Design*, 64, 7-8 (1994).

5 Minimalism is identified with a number of American artists including Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Rober Morris, Sol le Witt, Tony Smith, Donald Judd and Richard Serra.

6 I cannot find this opinion documented, yet it is familiar in studios.

7 This is the case in most of the professional journals, such as Maggie Toy, "Aspects of Architecture," *Architectural Design Profile No.139: Aspects of Minimal Architecture II*," *Architectural Design*, 69, 5-6 (1999), and the influential conference publication Vittorio E and Josep M. Montaner Savi (eds), *Less is More: Minimalism in Architecture and the Other Arts*, Barcelona; Collegi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya y ACTAR for UIABarcelona (1996).

8 The scholar who has done most to establish this view is Rosalind Krauss, "The Grid, the /Cloud/, and the Detail," in Detlef Mertins (ed), *The Presence of Mies*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994.

9 Ervin Panofsky, *Perspective as a Symbolic Form*, New York: Zone Books.

10 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Florence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

11 Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994.

12 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complete, 1929-34*, Zurich: Girsberg, 1964, p. 24.

13 Fried, "Art and Objecthood."

14 Adorno's ideas about artist material and its true historic nature are largely in the section "Coherence and Meaning," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 136-162. Adorno's other explicit text on material is the section "Inherent Tendency of Musical Material," in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

15 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, London, & New York: Granada, 1980, and elaborated in an essay of 1969 which became a book of the same title; Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c.1976.

16 Hermann Muthesius and Stanford Anderson, *Style –Architecture and Building –Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and Its Present Condition*, Santa Monica, CA, [Chicago]: Getty Centre for the History of Art and the Humanities; distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994.

17 www.wallpaper.com

18 My description of the paradox of unpopularity of the avant-garde derives from Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*.

19 See, for example, Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972: A Cross Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries*, London: Studio Vista, 1973.

20 A good overview is Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant–Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c.1996.

21 Smith's construction of a situation from a point of view and the world around him might be theatrical but it is closer to the Picturesque, as Robert Smithson went on to explore. Specifically, it reminds me of William Gilpin's travel accounts which, in their time, were startling and charming for Gilpin's finding aesthetic interest

in the quotidian. Gilpin's Northern Tour which did so much to popularise the scenery of the Lakes district was, for instance, written on the occasion of visiting his parents in Carlisle, a place as close and as far as New Jersey is to Cooper Union in Manhattan from where Smith departed with his car load of students.

22 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980; Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1990; *Michael Fried, Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860's*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

23 In this summary, I follow Thierry de Duve's account of Greenberg and Fried's disagreement with the Duchampian tendency in post-war American art. Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

24 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," in Hannah Arendt (ed), *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, section 15.

25 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*.

26 Adorno writes of what he calls 'happenings' and the hybridisation of the arts as an attempt by art to absorb its own negation. He thinks that by "conspicuously and wilfully ceding to crude material" art's tactic is to sink to a level below "living consciousness [....] a stratum of mute reference to what is beautiful." Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 258.

27 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 259.

28 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 3.

29 What Adorno has done is to take Benjamin's theory of the history of art as a transformation of cult value into exhibition value and frame this within an on-going dialectic, that of the enlightenment. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.258-9; Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991, pp. 110 ff.

30 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 42.